



# Goals and Expectations of Refugees: Perspectives of Social Service Providers

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## Article Details

Article Type: Research Article

Received date: 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023

Accepted date: 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2023

Published date: 02<sup>nd</sup> November, 2023

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**Citation:** Knox, A.W., and Brownell, G., (2023). Goals and Expectations of Refugees: Perspectives of Social Service Providers. *J Soci Work Welf Policy*, 1(2): 103. doi: <https://doi.org/10.33790/jswwp1100103>.

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## Abstract

The United States provides diverse resettlement initiatives that aim to foster inclusive and welcoming communities for refugees. This study examines refugees' goals and expectations from the perspective of social service providers. Data was collected through a focus group from 8 social service providers (3 were American-born, and 5 came to the United States as refugees themselves) who work with refugees in the Dallas Fort Worth metroplex. The findings identified five topics through a thematic analysis. The first two were related to how the social service providers viewed refugees—seeking safety and perseverance to overcome powerlessness, for example—while the third theme arose from how the social service providers saw refugees' objectives—becoming independent and self-sufficient—and the final two were about how they believed refugees should expect to be treated—learning about the culture and their need to gain sustainable employment. The findings also include the social service providers' perspectives on the cultural competency, diversity, and sensitivity skills needed to provide resettlement services and inevitably enhance the resettlement experiences of refugees in the United States. The characteristics necessary for success were derived from the traits that were recognized and utilized. The focus groups drove the social service discussions, which affected practice, education, and policy implications. The findings are helpful in advocating and allocating resources for resettlement services geared toward training social service providers.

**Keywords:** Acclimation, Advocacy, Cultural Competency, Cultural Diversity, Cultural Orientation, Cultural Sensitivity, Economic self-sufficiency, Educational Expect, Actions, Expectations Gaining Employment, Gaining Independence, Goals, Integration, Mutual Adaptation, Overcome Powerlessness, Policy Implications, Practice Implications, Refugee, Refugee Resettlement, Safety and Persistence, Service Delivery, Social Service Provider

## Introduction

Refugees are displaced people who leave their nations out of fear of retaliation, violence, or other social unrest [1]. There were 65.6 million persons involuntarily made to find a new home before 2017 [1]. There were only 22.5 million registered refugees [1]. Resettling refugees is an unusual humanitarian undertaking that necessitates

cooperation between resettlement organizations and the host nations. The United States is one of the top nations in the world for accepting refugees [1]. Refugees are the most at-risk group within the immigrant community. Research suggests that stress experienced after a move may be a considerable risk factor for mental health issues and challenges integrating, similar to stress encountered before or during the relocation [2, 3]. Refugees face a variety of challenges as soon as they arrive, including prior trauma, and anxiety about the future [4, 5]. Refugees usually rely heavily on resources and help to get through these obstacles and rebuild their lives.

In the United States, social service providers employed with resettlement agencies aid newly arrived refugees through program enrollment and follow-up [6, 7]. As part of the comprehensive strategy, an integrated program concurrently addresses economic support for refugees in strengthening their families and becoming self-sufficient [8]. Successful integration practices contribute to the economic prosperity of refugee families [9] and emphasize those with little to no English language skills and low educational skills [10]. Although most new refugees receive services and referrals to proper resources, others experience abandonment and cannot support themselves [11].

To assist refugees in becoming self-sufficient in their new environments, social service providers in the United States must master integration techniques. This process starts with an awareness of the objectives and standards of the resettlement process. For social service providers, their educational background which includes social work education, field experiences, and job orientation are important factors that increase their understanding of the refugee population as well as the knowledge and skills needed to provide competent resettlement services [12]. The following is an overview of the literature concerning the refugee resettlement in the United States, resettlement goals, the role of a refugee social service provider, and the refugee expectations.

Social service providers developed service delivery methods based on resources and their expectations for refugees [13]. Another important factor that might influence social service providers' understanding of and service delivery to this population is their perspective of what they think are the goals and expectations of the

refugees they work with. However, there is no existing study that explores refugees' goals and expectations from the viewpoint of their service providers. This study examined the viewpoints of social service providers on the objectives and expectations of refugees as well as the competencies required to offer services in American refugee resettlement agencies in order to close this knowledge gap. Resettlement agencies and the social work practice across the United States can adopt evidence from this study to ensure that social service providers' goals and expectations of refugees align with the goals and expectations of the refugees they work with, the resettlement process and the agencies they work with. Understanding refugees' goals and expectations from the perspective of social service providers will enhance other social service providers' ability to help refugees navigate the resettlement process and provide improved service to the refugee community using evidence-based practices.

## Review of The Literature

The fundamental idea behind the U.S. resettlement program is that refugees can gain from institutional support as they work toward economic self-sufficiency and begin to assimilate into their new nation [14-16]. The process of social service providers integrating refugees is dynamic, requiring work from all parties concerned, including a readiness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to give up their own sense of cultural significance and the commensurate openness with which host communities and governmental institutions have greeted migrants and attended to the demands of a multicultural population. The integration process is intricate and gradual, with different but connected legal, economic, social, and cultural components. Each aspect is crucial to refugees' ability to assimilate successfully as host culture members [17].

Studies that do not include the viewpoint of social service providers raise a number of problems regarding the services offered to refugees and the reasons behind the way in which those services are structured. Only a few research have employed the provider agencies as the analytical unit, which has allowed these studies to start filling in the knowledge gaps about services [18]. Past studies explored the perspectives of refugee services providers over accessibility and cultural effectiveness of refugee services [19], the wellbeing of refugees [20] refugees' resettlement to a new country [21]. Zubaroglu-Ioannides & Yalim, [20], on the other hand, reported comparable research on the viewpoint of social service providers in the state of New York. Twelve social service professionals were interviewed for this study; two were male and ten were female. All but one of the providers in the state of New York assisted refugees. One was employed out of state. This was one instance of comparative research done to try to understand, from the standpoint of social service providers, the objectives and expectations of refugees. The study's reflection cited the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601, which were shaped by well-known British laws [20]. The community's response was largely grounded in the securitization theory viewpoint. Social service providers received unfavorable comments regarding the local refugee resettlement program. Social care providers concluded from these replies that a reversal in the response to refugee resettlement would impede assimilation and make the process of acclimating the refugees more difficult [20]. Texas responded to refugee resettlement in a similar way, thus the program's effectiveness and the participants' length of stay helped ensure a seamless transfer of services. Zubaroglu-Ioannides & Yalim [20], however, note that, in contrast to many other states, New York's social assistance providers stated that the state was forthcoming and willing to aid refugees. Similar to Texas, the social service providers in New York concurred that the goals of the guided conversations align with the transformation that the Poor Laws sought to bring about in the lives of those who were disadvantaged. Like the Refugee Act, the primary changes that the

Poor Laws sought to bring about and maintain were workforce participation, work, and local accountability when it came to helping those in need [22]. New York's research was based on resettlement policies as it is related to the refugee's well-being. Research indicates that in order to prioritize the welfare of refugees' they receive direct assistance with paid employment, recreational pursuits, mobility, and areas of education and expertise. Additionally, one participant's organization offers direct assistance with mental health, and another with sheltering. In the event that refugees express any needs related to their bodily, and mental wellbeing, caregiving social relationships, or religion, research participants will direct refugees to the appropriate organizations [20]. Both the States of Texas and New York are aligned. The study's conclusions suggest that forcing social service providers to work without giving them enough time or assistance hinders their capacity to integrate into society.

On the other hand, research conducted by Edward & Hines-Martin, 2014, states other social service providers in a New York city neighborhood in the south have a distinct viewpoint than those in bigger cities. This viewpoint focused on the challenges for refugees in obtaining and keeping a job as well as having a reliable source of income. Although, according to Baran, Valcea, Porter, and Gallagher, 2018, obtaining employment and managing relationships in the workplace can be difficult since they invariably coexist with the difficulties of adjusting to a new culture. As a result, they regularly used social services that helped them obtain these resources. Living in densely populated areas on the outside of this large city also had an impact on the geographic accessibility of services, which was difficult by institutional obstacles, such as inadequate transportation. The providers expressed apprehension that the city's people lacked knowledge about the varied representation of refugee communities. Through educational initiatives and advertising, the local community was made more aware of the cultures of refugee groups. In terms of health and social organizations, the service providers claim that these outreach initiatives raised acceptance levels and aided in the development of dependable recipient-provider relationships [23].

According to Edward and Hines-Martin, [23] social service providers, programs must be adaptable and flexible in order to keep up with the shifting demographics of the community of foreign-born people. The providers highlighted how teamwork and community engagement aided in the creation of their programs, enabling them to customize culturally relevant initiatives to meet the urgent need of refugees. The study's implications for service institutions include changing offerings to better suit local cultural norms while also adapting to the social, political, and economic underpinnings of this southern city's norms. Despite their understanding of the requirements of the refugee resettlement, these providers found it difficult to remove contextually-related hurdles that prevented them from providing services.

*Mutual adaptation* is the term used to describe how the host society, social service providers, and refugees interact. It encourages diversity by integrating new cultures into the host community rather than requiring migrants to renounce their cultural identity [24]. After arriving in the United States, refugees can receive resources for up to five years [18]. English as a second language (ESL), job placement, employment, civics training, citizenship and naturalization, an intensive case management program, and an aid program for senior immigrants are among the resources available for the five years of the resettlement process. The social integration program and the refugee medical aid program are additional tools offered. Together, these programs, facilitated by social service providers, provide resources aimed at cultural orientation and economic self-sufficiency.

## Resettlement Goals

### Cultural Orientation

The goals of the social service providers are to provide cultural

orientation and assist refugees in becoming self-sufficient citizens. Cultural orientation assists refugees in progressively obtaining the knowledge and skills required to adjust to a new society and culture and assimilate aspects of the American culture into their core values and beliefs. Through discussion and introspection, they become familiar with the information needed to navigate their new society properly, which includes an awareness of available assistance and the potential difficulties they might encounter in their new communities.

Communities that welcome refugees report that effective cultural orientation driven by the social service providers are necessary to aid in integrating refugees and assisting them in adjusting to life in the United States. Given this, the U.S. government offers pre- and post-arrival cultural orientation through its affiliated non-governmental organizations, making orientation a continuous process. By putting learning into the context of the local area, post-arrival cultural orientation expands upon and examines pre-arrival cultural orientation. Another area of emphasis is laws and duties. With assistance and adequate explanation, refugees learn the laws and their responsibilities, including the public school system, the expected parental involvement, how to enroll their children, and how to use and pay for healthcare services. Additionally, gender dynamics, child raising, and shifting family responsibilities are discussed in relation to cultural adjustment. To break down barriers and foster confidence, local partners from institutions, including hospitals, banks, and police departments, are frequently invited to a cultural orientation. Aside from assistance through the social service providers, many towns also benefit from the assistance of volunteers who accompany refugees to local grocery stores and libraries or provide them with cultural orientation activities [25].

Economic self-sufficiency is defined as one of the key results anticipated as a social service provider. According to the Refugee Act of 1980, federal regulations define economic self-sufficiency as “producing a family’s overall income at a level that allows them to maintain themselves without needing a financial assistance grant from a program for refugees” [26]. The U.S. federal resettlement policy’s goal is not only for refugees to become self-sufficient but to do so quickly. To achieve the declared objective of “economic self-sufficiency,” the Refugee Act (1980) focuses on refugees’ access to employment. According to Renfroe [27], self-sufficiency does not necessarily mean the refugee is sufficient in the initial stage of the refugee resettlement program. The majority of refugees adjust after ten years. In other instances, they take 20 years to become citizens [28]. Renfroe [27] noted that the program does not always allow refugees to live self-sufficient lives within six months. To assist refugees in achieving self-sufficiency and allow a measurement for more feasible outcomes, social service providers often go beyond the scope of the contractual services of the resettlement agency and the federal government [27].

The Department of State expects to produce self-reliant individuals seeking educational opportunities, employment, and other services to meet their needs [29]. The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration [30] suggested a number of evidence-based practices [10, 30]. One of these evidence-based practices outlined a new model for social service providers to coordinate services, which includes short-term planning, similar services, internationally led services, and refugee interest groups, increasing stakeholder involvement and assistance in resettlement areas [10]. Other practices include building the capacity of host governments. The government and its stakeholders were able to handle the refugee crisis while looking for ways to address community responses because of the efficacy of the capacity building [30].

The United States developed ways to increase refugee integration through coordinated efforts facilitated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), as well as the nine partner resettlement organizations dedicated to resettling refugees in communities across

the country [31]. These agencies, with the assistance of the social service providers, seek partnerships with clear action plans [32], which include providing refugees with access to affordable housing and social and physical infrastructure [33].

A theoretical framework is cited to provide the refugee with greater assistance. The researcher decided to make use of the family systems theory in order to meet the demands of the families [34]. Family systems theory was the most effective way to address the demand as it is frequently linked to acknowledging traditional customs and values [10]. The researcher can better understand behavior in the context of the community by using family system theory [34]. This method is used by social service providers to identify the competencies required for integration [10]. Various study methodologies and questionnaires indicate that practitioners evaluate their effectiveness depending on the adoption of evidence-based techniques, government backing, and community awareness. This study will evaluate approaches that provide more context for the research design and data gathering. Findings will also make it possible to communicate the study’s conclusions.

### **Role of a Refugee Social Service Provider**

Refugee social service providers are responsible for introducing refugees to America with the hope of discovering a welcoming community. The liaison between the client and the general public is the social service provider. They are the connector that ensures that diversity and competency are valued [35]. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [36], cultural competence is defined as the willingness to assist clients in meeting their needs, considering their ethnic backgrounds. In 2019, Texas recorded the resettling of 57,000 refugees’ the largest resettlement population in the country. The individuals resettled in the Dallas/Fort Worth areas since 2014 included a mix of ethnicities, such as Bhutanese (Bhutan), Burmese (Burma), Somalian (Somali), the Democratic of the Congolese (Democratic Republic of the Congo), El Salvadorean (El Salvador), Iranian (Iran), and Iraqi (Iraq) [37]. In 2015, the New American Economy reported similar ethnicities with the uptake of Syrian (Syria) refugees [38].

Ethical standard guidelines suggest that social service providers are empathetic and considerate of all cultures, values, and beliefs [39]. Social service providers also assist newly arrived refugees with the feeling of hope and belonging [40]. Functional indicators such as employment, education, and economic stability are the benchmarks to assist social service providers in measuring successful integration [18]. Although, according to the 2018 study by Baran, Valcea, Porter, and Gallagher evidence states that refugees have exaggeratedly high expectations for life in the US, face severe underemployment, become dissatisfied with their jobs when underemployed, and in certain situations, contemplate giving up on the “American Dream” when they are extremely dissatisfied with integration efforts and their employment. Therefore, the ability to holistically support refugee clients beyond the scope of the expected services is an asset that the social service provider, including international staff, must possess when offering integrative services. A recent study found that social service providers rely on their expectations for refugees and the resources available to develop diverse methods for service delivery [13].

International social service providers must demonstrate the ability to communicate resolutions to various political differences and political parties worldwide. All international social service providers must undergo training involving cultural competence and diversity. The activity must be related to a cultural and professional development group. Van Selm [41] surveyed the staff of UNHCR to examine strategic use of resettlement practices. This study offered insight into the strategies that the U.S. social service providers can utilize in refugee resettlement.

Social service providers develop service delivery methods based on resources and their expectations for refugees [13]. Another important

factor that might influence social service providers' understanding of and service delivery to this population is their perspective of what they think are the goals and expectations of the refugees they work with.

### Refugee Expectations

According to Baran et al. [42], refugees' expectations can sometimes be unrealistic concerning the effort to pursue "The American Dream." For example, some refugees become highly dissatisfied with their jobs and have unrealistic expectations of the hourly wages, hours expected to work, the transferability of their education, and public assistance [42]. Therefore, social service providers must gain adequate knowledge and experience while working with the refugee population to provide appropriate guidance on life in America. The outcome of this process will lead to a realistic view of what it takes to live and remain in America, gain sustainable employment, and increase satisfaction among refugees in the United States. Refugees' expectations influence their perception of the services they consider helpful [13].

### Acclimation

Although acclimation is suddenly expected and eventually transformed, social service providers still have a learning curve. Capps et al. [10] highlighted some of the difficulties and achievements in integrating migrants into American society. While many refugees adjust well, others have difficulty completing theirs, which is an important determinant of self-sufficiency. Refugees have educational levels like those of native-born Americans and other immigrants. Refugees were less likely than Americans of U.S. birth to have finished high school between 2009 and 2011, even though the two populations were equally likely to earn a bachelor's degree. There was no gender difference in college achievement among all refugees, while refugee men were slightly more likely than refugee women to have completed high school. Amongst the ethnic groups, progress varies. It is possible refugees' degrees from their country of origin were less likely to transfer to the American labor market directly. The quality and content of degrees obtained abroad may differ from those obtained in the United States, and employers may not recognize unfamiliar degrees or certifications. In contrast to other immigration groups, refugees might need help obtaining their credentials because they must leave their countries swiftly [10]. It is impossible to follow a particular refugee's progress in education over time because the American Community Survey (ACS), which is directed by the U.S. Census Bureau, is not longitudinal. However, when comparing information from the 2000 U.S. Census and the 2009-2011 ACS, it is possible to assess refugee attainment over time. The Migration Policy Institute used a similar methodology, finding that 10% percent of refugees who arrived in 2000 or earlier completed high school by 2009-2011. An additional 10% received a bachelor's degree [10].

The degree of quality in the United States may not be equivalent to the reciprocity of the educational system or the academic degrees obtained in the country of origin. Therefore, social service providers must know the reciprocity process and possess the skills to encourage and empower refugees to move forward. Dyssegaard and Mathema [43] found that refugees who are likely to speak the language of the host nation tend to advance in employment quicker and, therefore, are more likely to make advances toward self-sufficiency as compared to their refugee counterparts who do not speak the language of the resettlement country.

### Purpose of The Study

Previous studies addressed refugee resettlement in the United States, resettlement goals, the role of a refugee social service provider, and refugees' expectations. However, there is no existing study that explores refugees' goals and expectations from the viewpoint of their service providers. To help fill this gap, this study examined social service providers' perspectives on refugees' goals and expectations and the skills needed to provide services in refugee resettlement

organizations in the United States. Understanding social service providers' perception of refugees' goals and expectations will enhance agencies' ability to help prepare service providers to navigate the resettlement process and provide improved service to the refugee community using evidence-based practices.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore refugees' goals and expectations from the perspective of social service providers. The study sought to answer one research question: What are the goals and expectations of refugees from the perspective of social service providers, and two research sub-questions: What are the goals and roles of a social service provider? What skills of a social service provider are helpful to offer resettlement services and, ultimately, improve the resettlement experiences of refugees in the U.S.?

### Methodology

This study is exploratory and uses qualitative research methods. The qualitative data used in this study is a subset of a larger study which explored the integrative nature of resettlement services, social service providers' perspectives on refugees' goals and expectations and best practices of caring for refugees. Data was collected through a focus group discussion with eight social service providers from four resettlement agencies in the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex. The focus group interviews were verbatim transcribed from audio recordings. To ensure confidentiality of participants, the principal investigator removed all identifiers during the transcription process. The city and organizations were selected for convenience and the resettlement services they offer. This study used a convenience and purposeful sampling which resulted in 8 social service provider participants. Data was collected using group interviews (focus groups) and then analyzed for thematic content. The study was approved by the principal investigator's university's institutional review board.

### Sampling Procedures

Service providers from four organizations that assist with refugee resettlement were invited to participate in the study through a letter of invitation sent through email by the primary investigator. A letter of approval from the local resettlement agencies were obtained along with the contact information of their staff interested in participating in the study. Email reminders were sent to those who indicated interest. The application of social service practices to refugee resettlement in the United States was discussed in the focus group, providing answers to the research question.

### Data Collection Procedures

The Principal Investigator (PI) conducted a focus group which allowed for rich discussions between participants and allowed the researcher to delve into issues that arose during the discussions. Focus group questions and a discussion guide were used to provide a conversation framework. The focus group lasted 1.5-2 hours and was held in a private room of one of the agencies. Each participant willingly signed an informed consent after the PI informed them of their rights and the PI's plan to keep the data confidential and anonymous when published. With the participants' permission, the focus group was audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim for data analysis. A method for semi-structured interviews was employed to investigate topics related to participants' perspectives' on refugees' goals and objectives experience providing refugee services. Examples of the questions included: What are your perceptions of refugees? What do you think are the goals and expectations of refugees?

### Data Analysis

The PI analyzed the data using a process of inductive qualitative data analysis, specifically thematic content analysis [44, 45]. Beginning with the open coding, the PI carefully read through the transcript line by line several times and noted categories and themes that stood out related to each specific question. Next, the PI reviewed, expanded, and collapsed concepts to ensure accuracy and consider relationships and patterns across concepts in adherence to thematic content

analysis [45]. Finally, specific direct quotes were identified to reflect the concepts that emerged through the coding process. The initial content was compared with the PI's notes gathered during the focus group. A research assistant served as a second coder to help check the codes/interpretations against the data. The second coder independently coded by identifying emerging themes and together, the PI and second coder discussed the emergent themes and emerging meanings to reach a consensus while framing the final interpretations of the results.

### Participants

The participants included eight social service providers who work in refugee resettlement in the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex. Five out of the eight participants came to the United States as refugees. Of the eight respondents, there were four females and four males. Their education ranged from bachelor's degrees to master's degrees, with extensive experiences with refugee resettlement agencies. One of the service providers worked in the field of social services for 1-3 years, two participants worked in refugee services for 7-9 years, and five worked in the area for ten or more years. In addition, two participants worked in refugee services for 1-2 years, three for 4-6 years, and three worked for ten years or more. The sample of social service providers included social workers, case workers, program managers, and direct service staff in refugee resettlement and adjustment positions.

### Results

The thematic analysis revealed five themes. The first two relate to social service providers' perception of a refugee including: Seeking safety and persistence to overcome powerlessness, the third theme emerged from their perceptions of refugees' goals (Gaining independence/ Self-sufficiency) while the last two themes that derived from the social service providers' perception of refugees' expectations: Cultural information and gaining employment.

### Findings

#### **Perception of a refugee:** *Seeking Safety and Persistence to Overcome Powerlessness*

The participants unanimously agreed that refugees who migrate to the United States flee their countries due to political or social conflict. However, participants with personal refugee experiences pointed out the lack of choice or powerlessness in becoming a refugee and navigating the subsequent reintegration process. One participant that came to the United States as a refugee described migration as "excruciating." Five of the eight participants who came to the United States as refugees described refugees as individuals who experience forced migration and a complex change in their environment since they would have preferred to stay in their homeland. One participant's remark captured refugees' quest for "seeking safety and persistence to overcome powerlessness." "Refugees do not come here because they want to be here. They come because they have no choice in the resettlement process in most cases. They are scared to engage in war or be killed." According to UNHCR [46], refugees are forced to travel international borders for safety when there is no protection in their countries of origin—protection that the State is unwilling or unable to offer. In fact, Renkens, Rommes, and van den Muijsenbergh [47], also reports seeing refugees as insecure and powerless when without the necessary resources.

#### **Perception of Refugees' goals:** *Gaining Independence/ Self-sufficiency*

Next, the PI asked the social service providers to share their perception of refugees' goals in coming to the United States. In the focus group, every service provider shared similar opinions. Capturing this theme, one participant explained,

"Economic Self-sufficiency is crucial for a refugee. Gaining independence demonstrates a successful outcome. Positive influence is felt if the goals are achieved. The positive influence of self-sufficiency through employment offers stability and an economic contribution to society. Therefore, the refugee's independence not only helps one individual, it can help an entire community."

**Goals and Expectations of Refugees:** Perspectives of Social Service Providers migrate to the United States [48].

#### **Perception of Refugees' expectations:** *Cultural Information and Gaining Employment*

Together, they shared the general expectation that all refugees find employment or some other income source. The group agreed that only a few refugees benefit from government assistance such as Social Security Disability; therefore, employment is the primary source of income. According to the focus group participants,

When the refugee is given the proper tools to succeed in employment by the social service provider teams, the refugee performs very well in their duties. Many of them work in their positions for many years and are trained by the social service providers with job upgrades/supervisory positions. In these positions, they are able to assist other refugees with employment. The social service providers expect above average job performance and the willingness to advance in their positions.

Within the group of social service providers who participated in the study, there were some differences in what they perceived as refugees' expectations and goals. The American born social service provider participants perceived refugees' expectation as living a better life and becoming self-sustaining citizens as their goal.

Discussions on what social service providers perceive as refugees' expectations when they come to the United States, give rise to themes of cultural training and employment. All of the participants shared their beliefs of when refugees come to the United States, they expect to be provided with knowledge about the resettlement process as well as some form of cultural information. All eight participants' responses aligned with the US Department of State's expectations that the United States Department of State (2021) provides a cultural orientation to refugees in hopes of easy acclimation to the country. According to one participants,

"The refugee receives cultural orientation overseas in the refugee camp or refugee community before traveling to the U.S. as it is in regards to their expectations. As the refugee arrives in the United States to be received by their national Voluntary Agency (VOLAG), they are provided with additional cultural orientation, then again at the statewide refugee affiliate agency."

#### **Subtheme:** *Perception of Cultural Competency and Confidence in Resettlement Agencies*

The refugees' expectations of cultural information gave rise to two subthemes: the social service provider's perspective of the agency's reaction through cultural competency and their confidence in the resettlement agencies' capacity to assist participants in meeting their objectives. First, the participants emphasized the need to master the refugee process and practice cultural humility, competence, and sensitivity when providing quality services to refugee migration. The participants also agreed that "cultural competency and sensitivity are essential."

According to Lau & Rodgers [12], the skill of cultural competency is widely acknowledged when working with refugees. This skill allows the social service providers the opportunity to provide fair and efficient programming through the agency's point-of-services. One participant stated, "knowing the refugee's background is important. This knowledge allows the refugee to trust you and confide in you." Another stated, "Knowing something about the refugee will also give you the tools to serve the refugee better, knowing where he is from, where he has been, his health status, and his level of employability." To formulate positive working relationships, the social service providers must understand the refugees and be able to advocate on their behalf. Lau & Rodgers [12] states that the social service providers are frequently the refugee's initial point of contact in assisting them in acclimating to life in a new nation. Therefore, creating an environment that can foster rapport and trust can offer a flow of continuity of care, making clear roles of the social service provider.

On the contrary, the social service providers also mentioned the need to have “support from the agency in providing the necessary tools in meeting the objectives for the resettlement process assessed by the Office of Refugee Resettlement.” It was the perspective of all participants that the agency must make certain the staffing is “linguistically aligned with the ethnicities served.” One participant noted, “Having guidance that is individually and linguistically aligned with the refugee brings hope, trust, and initial instructions towards sustainability of community resources.” Hiring of staff within refugee resettlement organizations measure the level of providing aligned language skills with adequate and required programming in serving refugees. In a recent review, Acar, Pinar-Irmak, and Stone-MacDonald [49], showed how important it is to design, carry out, and research linguistically sensitive programs for refugees living in host nations.

Refugee resettlement provides an opportunity for social service providers to reflect on their professional duties as they are on the forefront of service delivery practices. These implications provide knowledge, skills, and capacities when working with refugees from different cultural backgrounds individuals, families, groups, and communities. A social service provider must have the necessary skills to carry out the duties that will contribute to growth and success in various multicultural communities [50]. This philosophy was revealed in the focus group when the participants shared the need for cultural competence and humility at the community level. The participants also suggested community-based intervention through discussions on cultural competence, sensitivity, and diversity at various organizations within refugee environments (schools, employers, hospitals, local government organizations) and how they would benefit refugees. Developing strong ties within the community will guarantee refugees are understood and supported. The traits that were identified and served was the basis for the attributes required for success. The discussions of the social service providers led to their effects on policy, education, and practice was driven by the focus groups.

## Discussion: Implications for Social Service Providers

### Practice Implications

This study provides new and insightful insights into social service providers’ understanding of refugees including who they are as well as their goals and expectations as refugees. The findings from this study can be used to “improve resettlement service delivery by social service providers” understanding of the resettlement process and the role that cultural competency and sensitivity play in improving resources, service delivery, and outcomes of resettlement services. Capps et al. [10] suggested that competency affects the delivery of services and outcomes. Investing in education and training to enhance knowledge, cultural competency, and sensitivity among social service providers is recommended for those who assist refugees. It is also recommended that service organizations recruit social service providers with specific training in working with displaced individuals. The intention is to teach the staff the value of integrated approaches, such as cultural sensitivity, diversity, and competency, when dealing with refugees. In order for staff to effectively advocate for, empower, and assist in transforming refugee clients into self-sufficient members of their new community, this educational support may serve as the necessary building brick or foundation. In 2009, the National Association of Social Workers recommended that social service providers become proficient in cultural competency, diversity, and sensitivity in order to provide better services to refugees. Professionals can advance in their awareness of their clients, their background, and the problems that were common in the clients’ native country by adhering to evidence-based methods that make use of these skills. The results of this study clearly imply that social service providers should keep taking cultural competency, sensitivity, diversity, and other continuing education courses in order to better meet the requirements of refugees. In order to adjust these abilities when recruiting, it would also be beneficial for them to start a conversation with their managers and human

resource officials. Task forces should be established by social service providers to help in the recruitment of professionals who wish to work in international services.

### Educational Implications

The researchers can make the findings from this study available through refugee provider meetings. Social service providers can advocate for refugees through these meetings and educate local law enforcement, government officers, and other stakeholders. Educating society on the contributions made by refugees would also create a positive view of the population. As an asset to society, the population’s increase in support for refugee resettlement opens doors for integrated and successful social service practices. Social service providers serving refugees include investing in education and training to increase providers’ knowledge, cultural competency, and sensitivity. Drawing upon the findings, the researchers also recommended that service organizations recruit social service providers with specific training to prepare them to assist displaced individuals and refugees. This instructional support may serve as the cornerstone or starting point those personnel need to more effectively empower, advocate for, and help refugee clients become self-sufficient members of their new community.

### Policy Implications

Results from this study can contribute to improved refugee-related policies in the United States. The study identified the misalignment of social service providers’ goals and expectations, as well as cultural competency and sensitivity skills as potential obstacles while serving the population. The capacity of research to influence policymakers and other stakeholders to adjust to the study results is what determines its usefulness. Lobbying legislators is essential when this group is in charge of upcoming programs. The likelihood of receiving more or future funds will rise if authorities get training on refugee resettlement.

### Limitations

There is limited research on social service providers’ perspectives on resettlement experiences of refugees in the United States. This study sought to fill this gap in practice knowledge. This study had other shortcomings. Self-reported data are scarce and rarely allow for independent verification, even if focus group participants have a stake in the population they serve and the problem statement was pertinent to all of them [51]. The data that the focus group participants self-reported was used by the researcher. The focus group included representatives from a number of refugee resettlement organizations that share the same government funding standards. The University of Southern California [51] states that because all of the agencies that participated in the poll are in competition for the same federal funding; therefore, it is likely that attribution the act of attributing favorable events and results to one’s own agency will occur. In terms of research, future studies may explore refugees’ goals, expectations and their lived experiences from their perspectives.

**Competing Interest:** The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

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